

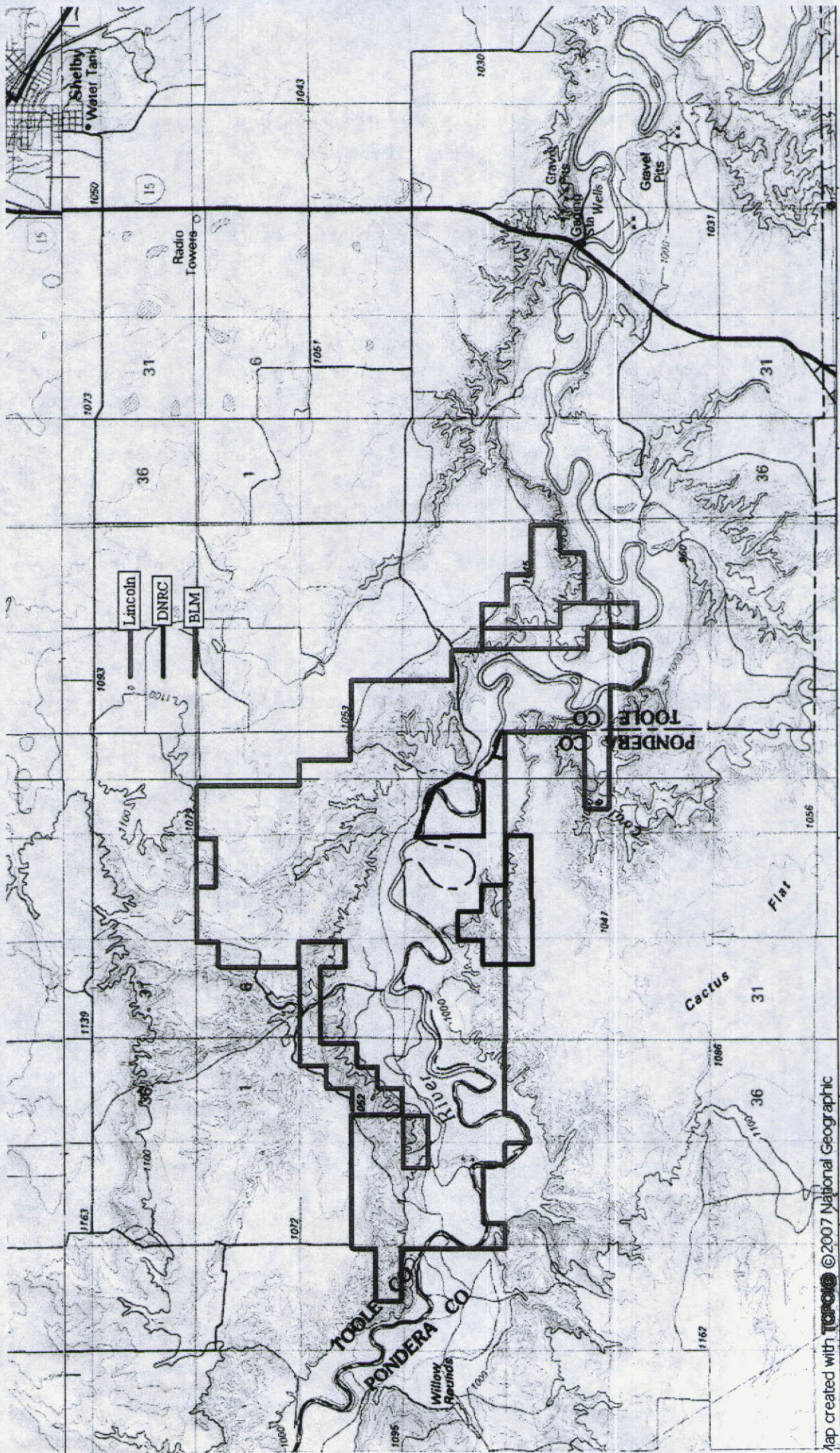
LINCOLN RANCH ACQUISITION FACT SHEET

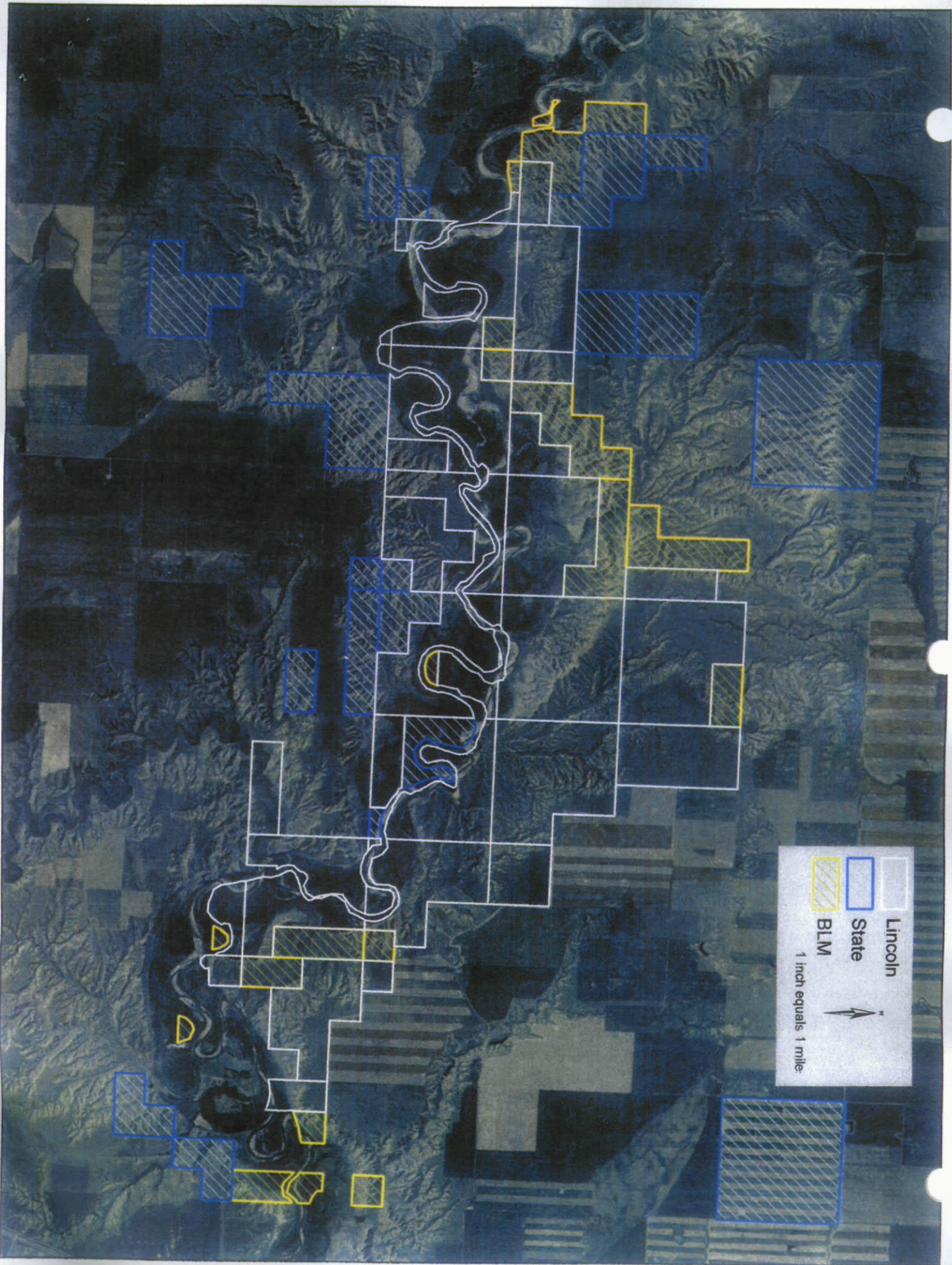
SEPTEMBER 2008

In 2007, local rancher and wilderness enthusiast, Charlie Lincoln passed away. In his estate, he bequeathed his ranch to the Archdiocese of Helena with the stipulation that if the Archdiocese decided to sell the ranch, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) would be given the right of first refusal to meet the highest offer.

Mr. Lincoln's, 7,540-acre ranch incorporates a variety of habitats supporting numerous game and non-game species, **fourteen miles of the Marias River** still in a natural free flowing state with a variety of native and sport fish species, unique geological and cultural resources, and recreational potential for diverse users groups. The most obvious feature of this property is the undeveloped, natural conditions found throughout. There are few if any river bottom properties like this left in northcentral Montana. The contiguous size absent of development, owned on both sides of a major river, and the virtually unchanged pre- European landscape is rare.

OWNER:	<	Heirs and Devisees of Charlie Lincoln, deceased
PROPERTY RIGHT TO BE ACQUIRED:	<	Fee Title
PROPERTY DATA:	<	Property located in Toole and Pondera Counties, T31N, R3 and 4W, Approximately 7 miles SW of Shelby
COST:	<	\$7.6 million
FUNDING	<	Access Montana and Habitat Montana Acquisition Funds
PROCESS:	<	Draft Environmental Assessment distributed; End of 30-day Public Comment Period 7/9/08; Decision Notice issued 7/16/08; FWP Commission Approval – 08/28/08.

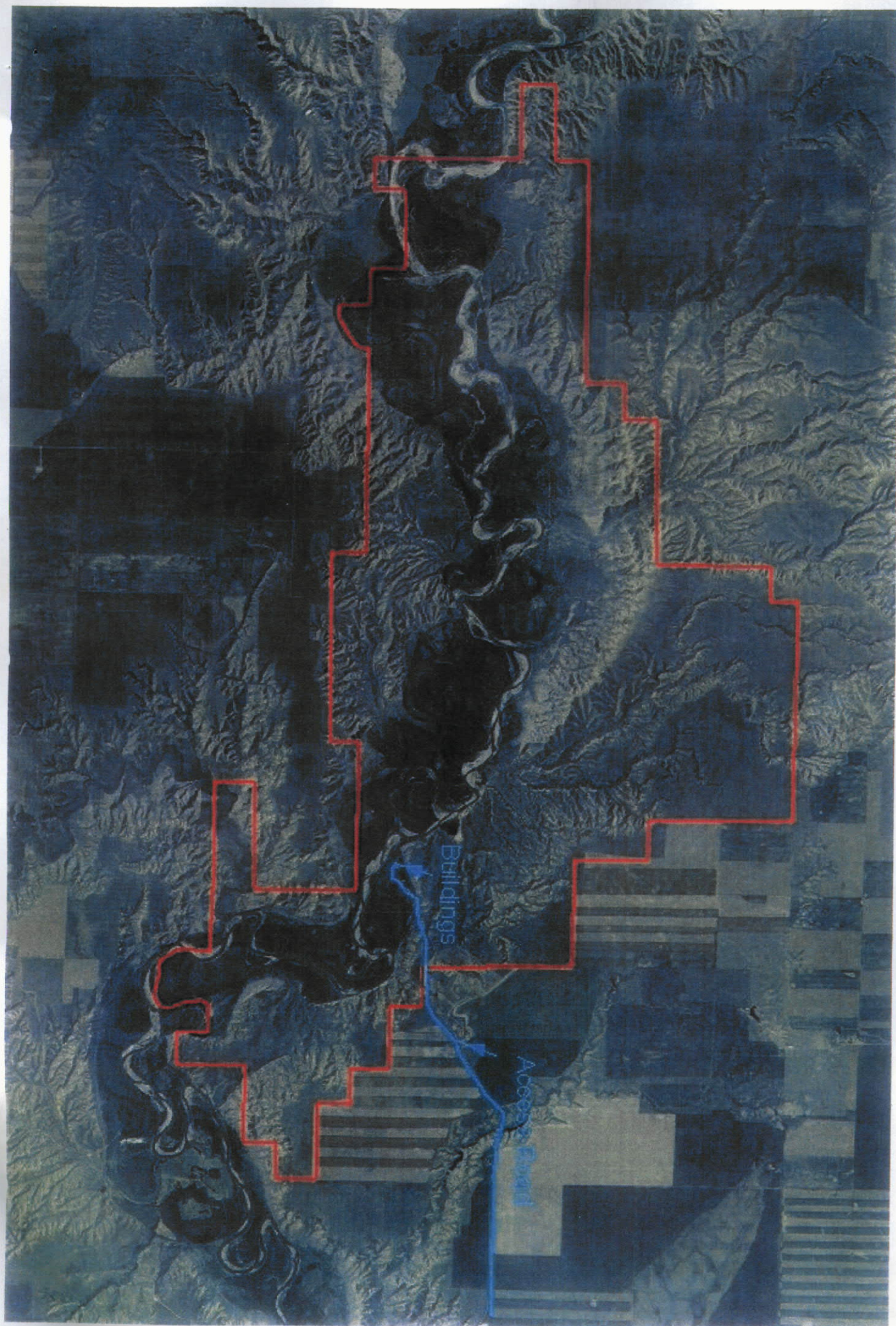




Lincoln
State
BLM

1 inch equals 1 mile.





FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 5, 2008

Division: Wildlife, Fish & Parks

Agenda Item: Lincoln Ranch Fee Acquisition (R4)

Action Needed: Status Update

Time Needed on Agenda: 10 minutes

Background: The 7,540-acre Lincoln Ranch is located eight miles southwest of Shelby and 70 miles northwest of Great Falls, in Toole and Pondera Counties and straddles 14 miles of the Marias River (see map). The Will of Mr. Charlie Lincoln granted to Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks a right of first refusal: "...shall have the right to meet the high bid, and to acquire..." for purchase of his ranch. The property represents a significant land acquisition opportunity for wildlife habitat and public recreation. These 7,540 deeded acres incorporate by lease an additional 1,325 acres of DNRC and BLM land. The property includes 14 miles of river frontage, with extensive and unaltered cottonwood gallery forest and riparian habitats (41%) and sagebrush-grasslands and river 'breaks' habitats (59%).

In June 2008 the Estate offered the ranch for sale via sealed bid. On July 14, they opened the bids and conducted a public auction among the qualified bidders who submitted a sealed bid. The final price offered was \$4,750,000. The Estate rejected this bid. FWP remains interested in the parcel and is in contact with the Estate to discuss potential options for moving forward.

The purchase would be made with funds from varied sources including the Habitat Montana Program, The Governor's Access Montana Initiative, non-governmental organization contributions and conservation/sportsmen groups.

Public Involvement Process: FWP Commissioners endorsed the proposed action at their April 26, 2008 meeting. An Environmental Assessment was published on June 19. A 21-day public comment period ended on July 10. A public meeting was held in Shelby, July 7, to receive public comment and answer questions. Face-to-face meetings were held with two neighboring landowners. Written comments were received from 35 individuals or parties. Oral comments were recorded from three individuals at the public hearing for which 34 individuals attended. Phone calls were received from two individuals. Several Great Falls Tribune articles have been published over the course of the last year and have generated a high level of public attention to the project. A decision notice was published on July 16 recommending acquisition of the property in fee.

Alternatives and Analysis: FWP is proposing to purchase the Lincoln Ranch and manage it as a combined State Park and Wildlife Management Area. If FWP does not pursue the acquisition, the property will be sold to a private buyer (high bidder) for unstated purposes. By virtue of the public bidding process implemented by the Diocese of Helena and estate representatives, the property will be sold. Pursuit of Conservation Easement opportunities for the property were met with no interest.

FWP has maintained close communication with the Lincoln Estate representatives and attorney. Timing has been a critical element in understanding and now acting as a result of the property bidding process. If the decision is made to match the high bid, FWP will bring the details of the proposed transaction, including price and funding sources, to the Commission for a decision at the July 17 meeting.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends proceeding with fee purchase of the Lincoln Ranch if a fair price can be reached. Purchase of the property will conserve its outstanding habitat and recreational values and forge a new era for management of the area as both a State Park and Wildlife management Area.

DECISION NOTICE

For

Proposed Lincoln Ranch Acquisition Region 4 Habitat Montana Proposed Land Project



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road, Great Falls, MT 59405

July 16, 2008

BACKGROUND, DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes the acquisition of 7,540 acres of important wildlife habitat along the Marias River. The property straddles 14 miles of the Marias River approximately 8 miles southwest of Shelby and 70 miles northwest of Great Falls. The property is currently operated as a private ranch, consisting of 7,540 deeded acres, 492 acres of leased State School Trust (SST) lands managed by Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), and 833 U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) acres. Important wildlife habitats that exist on these lands include riparian river bottom, cottonwood gallery forest, sagebrush grassland, and river breaks.

The property would be purchased through a combination of funding sources, potentially including FWP's Habitat Montana program and the Governor's Access Montana Initiative approved by the 2007 Legislature. FWP, by virtue of the right of first refusal as granted in the Will of Charlie Lincoln upon sale of the Ranch, will use that right to acquire the property through fee-title purchase of the deeded acres. The leases of BLM and DNRC acres within the boundary of the property that are now held by the current landowner will be transferred to FWP.

The scope of this Environmental Assessment (EA) primarily covers the acquisition of the property. Future significant management/development activities will be addressed by subsequent EAs.

In proposing to acquire the Lincoln Ranch, FWP seeks to meet the following needs:

- Protect and enhance riparian, sagebrush grasslands, and cottonwood gallery habitats;
- Protect in perpetuity 14 miles of the Marias River and its water-borne resources;
- Manage wildlife and fisheries habitat in a sustainable manner to support priority fish and wildlife species;

- Propose reestablishment of fish species native to the Marias River;
- Provide public access to over 10,700 acres of continuous habitat that is currently inaccessible for recreational uses;
- Provide opportunity and access for public hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking, non-motorized boating, and opportunity for other public recreational users;
- Protect wildlife habitat and fisheries resource from incompatible land uses or development and potentially loss of public access to those resources;
- Promote a river and ground based state park that provides multiple levels and options of recreational opportunities;
- Develop and provide educational interpretive programs that promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation, preservation of important natural and cultural resources, and appreciation of park values;
- Promote tourism through recreation opportunities that will benefit local communities;
- Identify and preserve important cultural, heritage, geologic, and paleontologic resources;
- Manage as a cooperative and combined WMA and State Park.

Alternative A – Proposed Action:

FWP proposes to acquire 7,540 acres of important wildlife habitat along the Marias River as described in this EA. Through the Proposed Action, FWP would secure permanent public access to this land, as well as to an additional 1,840 acres of difficult-to-access, adjacent public lands (BLM, DNRC lands), and including approximately 14 miles of Marias River shoreline. This project would conserve animal and plant species biodiversity and important wildlife habitat that exists on these lands, including riparian, sagebrush grasslands and cottonwood gallery forest. Also conserved and ultimately made available to the public will be recreational opportunities associated with these habitats, the river system and the opportunity for interpretation of historic, cultural and natural resources.

Alternative B – No Action:

Under the No Action alternative, FWP would forgo the opportunity to purchase the Lincoln Ranch. There would continue to be no or little public access to the property for recreation, and land access to approximately 1,840 acres of adjoining BLM and DNRC lands could not be guaranteed. It is possible that under the No Action alternative this property will be subdivided and developed for rural homesites, with significant adverse impacts to natural habitats or privatized for recreational uses.

Alternatives C – Third Party Purchase with a FWP Conservation Easement:

Other private parties have expressed interest in this property. If the fee title purchase price of the property exceeds FWP's financial resources, FWP will investigate the

possibility of collaboratively purchasing a conservation easement with the new owners provided interests of both parties could be met. Alternatively, FWP may acquire fee ownership and then trade portions of the property to a private party while reserving conservation and public access easement(s) that meet or exceed its conservation and public access goals. FWP has established a long, effective and consistent track record of working with private landowners to protect and enhance important wildlife habitats while simultaneously maintaining private operating and productive ranches on the Montana landscape. If suitable terms of protection and use can be negotiated, it is conceivable that passage of the Lincoln Ranch into private ownership can be facilitated while simultaneously protecting important resource and recreational values on the property. Provisions of the Lincoln Will do not directly allow for or direct such an effort. Any such effort and result will be at the consent of the new private landowner.

PUBLIC COMMENT

In compliance with Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), FWP completed an EA with a subsequent public involvement process. Public participation is not a plebiscite to measure those in favor of or opposed to a proposal, but is a mechanism for agencies to consider substantive comments.

The public comment period for this EA opened on June 19, 2008. The proposed acquisition was featured in news articles done by the Great Falls Tribune staff covering the proposed purchase, as well as the unique nature of the Charlie Lincoln Will wherein a right of first refusal for purchase of the Ranch was granted. Those news stories ran during the course of the last calendar year. FWP issued news releases to all regional media and the Associated Press on June 19, 2008 of the publication of this Environmental Assessment. A public meeting was held on July 7, 2008 in Shelby, MT to answer questions and collect oral and written comments. Hard copies of the EA were available to all who attended the meeting. The comment period ended July 10, 2008. The draft EA was available on the FWP website under Public Notices (www.fwp.mt.gov <<http://www.fwp.mt.gov>>), or by calling (406) 454-5840. A hard copy of the EA was available at the Region 4 Headquarters (4600 Giant Springs Road, Great Falls, MT). The draft EA was mailed to over 80 entities reflecting the interest from local, state and federal agencies, non-government organizations, local legislators, local and immediately adjacent landowners, county commissioners and private parties who had previously expressed an interest..

Face-to-face meetings were held with two neighboring landowners. Written comments were received from 35 individuals or parties. Oral comments were recorded from three individuals at the public hearing for which 34 individuals attended. Phone calls were received from two individuals.

This Decision Notice addresses several concerns and issues raised during the public input process, and modifications have also been made to a Preliminary Management Plan. It is important to note that this EA covers only the acquisition of the property and initial management actions. Any substantial changes in future management, including

establishing campgrounds, will be subject to additional environmental analysis and public comment.

Our responses to public inquiries or concerns are summarized below. The Environmental Assessment can be found at the FWP website.

DECISION

The trend toward the sale of traditional ranching/farming to recreational buyers or interests focused on subdivision of key wildlife habitats has accelerated recently. Purchase of the Lincoln Ranch will maintain this property in open space while providing for public enjoyment of this landscape and the river system that flows through it. Given the increasingly high value placed on Marias River recreational properties, if this property is not purchased by FWP, it is likely that either subdivision or exclusive access interests will acquire the Lincoln Ranch, and opportunities for habitat protection and public enjoyment of this landscape could be lost.

After review of this proposal and addressing concerns of local residents and landowners, as well as considering the significant public support for this project, it is my recommendation to acquire the property known as the Lincoln Ranch from the Helena Catholic Diocese subject to approval by the FWP Commission and the State Land Board. As such, I recommend Alternative A - Proposed Action, as identified in the EA. Through the Proposed Action, FWP would secure public access to 10,700 acres on this property (7,540 acres in fee-title, 1,325 acres of DNRC and BLM leases), as well as to an additional 1,835 acres of difficult-to-access, adjacent public lands (BLM, DNRC lands), and approximately 14 miles of Marias River shoreline. The project will conserve animal and plant species biodiversity and important wildlife habitat that exists on these lands, including riparian, sagebrush grasslands and cottonwood gallery forest. Recreational opportunities associated with these habitats, the river system and the opportunity for interpretation of historic, cultural and natural resources will be preserved.

The draft version of the EA, this Decision Notice, and the Preliminary Management Plan serve as the final documents addressing this proposal.

/S/

July 16, 2008

Gary Bertellotti
Regional Supervisor
Great Falls, MT

DATE

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public comments have been summarized into various issues that reflect the public comments received, and are presented along with FWP responses. Changes or additions to the Preliminary Management Plan, in response to public comment, are also indicated in the FWP responses. The EA can also be found on FWP's website (www.fwp.mt.gov) under public notices.

Written comments were received from 33 individuals and/or parties. Three individuals provided oral comments at the public meeting, 34 individuals attended the public meeting, and phone calls were received from two parties. Individual meetings were also held with two parties of adjacent landowners.

IN SUPPORT OF PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

We are supportive of FWP following the Preferred Alternative, and continuing negotiations to acquire the Lincoln Ranch.

FWP agrees that the Lincoln Ranch, located 8 miles southwest of Shelby along the Marias River, represents a significant land acquisition opportunity for wildlife habitat, public recreation and the preservation of cultural, historic and natural resources. The proposed purchase is intended to protect and enhance important wildlife habitat, including nearly 14 miles of Marias River shoreline, from subdivision or development, and to provide recreational access to more than 10,700 acres of contiguous public land and habitat. Emphasis on the river related recreational opportunities for fishing, floating and boat camping will be made.

STATE SCHOOL TRUST LANDS

How will the proposed acquisition affect the School State Trust lands (referred to as DNRC lands in the EA) within the parcel? Will the Trust be losing money?

A clarification of DNRC/State School Trust lands as referenced in the EA is in order. State School Trust (SST) lands are administered by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). But SST lands are a separate from other state-owned lands in that the primary purpose of such lands is to raise revenue for the Montana public school system. Any references to SST lands as "DNRC lands" in the EA were inadvertent and not intended to convey any inferences about the nature or purpose of these lands.

Leasing procedures for SST lands, managed by DNRC, can be found in Title 77, Chapter 6, of the Montana Code Annotated. With purchase of the Lincoln Ranch, DNRC would assign the included SST lands (492 acres in T31N, R3W, portions S16,17,18,19 & 20) to FWP for the balance of the 10-year lease currently in place. Additionally, if FWP grazes the SST lands with livestock during the current lease period, the lease will remain a grazing lease when it comes up for bid. If the SST lands are not grazed by livestock during the remainder of the current lease, when it is re-bid the lease will be changed to recreational status with a likely increased lease fee.

DETAIL WITHIN THE PRELIMINARY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The EA lacks details on how the property will be managed. How does FWP intend to manage the many recreation-days it anticipates, consumptive and non-consumptive users, and still ensure quality game hunting and recreational opportunities?

FWP acknowledges the public desire for more detail as contained in the attached Preliminary Management Plan, and has updated that Plan to reflect these concerns and interests. FWP will consider additional management guidelines in the event that conflicts between users and/or surrounding landowners develop over time.

It is important to note that the EA and the Preliminary Management Plan are separate documents developed for discrete purposes. The EA is designed to engage public participation, whereas the Preliminary Management Plan will be an evolving document that FWP will use to guide management of the property. Any substantial change from the actions identified within the EA (e.g. development of a campsite) would warrant an additional EA, and re-engagement of the public. It is the Departments commitment that within a period of the next two years, the public will again be engaged by a formal process to solicit input and ideas for finalization of a Management Plan.

UNLIMITED PUBLIC USE

The EA implies that this property will provide abundant recreation-days and will be open to the public 24-7. Has FWP considered the impacts this will have in terms of: enforcement, road management (dust, noise, increased traffic), off-road vehicles, fire danger, impacts to wildlife, dispersal of game onto private lands, litter, weed management, public safety, fencing, etc? FWP should have someone on staff 24-7 on the property.

FWP acknowledges these concerns. In response to the concerns over 'unlimited public use', FWP will update the Management Plan to provide more controlled access to the site, e.g. regulated access for hunting purposes, voluntary registration procedures for floaters, until operations funding and staffing allow otherwise. Please see the attached Preliminary Management Plan for additional strategies designed to balance the number of users, the quality of the recreation experience, and to reduce impacts on neighboring ranches.

ROAD MANAGEMENT

How will Fish, Wildlife & Parks address road management given the suggested increase in traffic in the area? Has FWP discussed this with Pondera and/or Toole Counties?

FWP has yet to engage Toole or Pondera County officials. The road leading to the Lincoln homestead is an obvious choice for public entry to the property. It is the only publicly maintained and improved access point into the Ranch. FWP will work with the County and adjacent private property owners to improve signage in the area and physically manage traffic flow, location and safety.

Motorized travel within the Lincoln Ranch property beyond the point of entry will not be permitted. Only non-motorized traffic will be allowed off of this designated travel routes. Please see the Preliminary Management Plan for additional strategies

Road Dust - FWP is sensitive to the possibility of increased road dust levels in areas along primary access road to the property. In order to mitigate this problem FWP would implement the following actions:

- Work with Toole County to ensure that appropriate speed limits are posted and enforced on the primary access road into the site.
- Consider applying dust abatement solution (magnesium chloride/lignun) to the primary access road into the property.
- Look at long term solutions with local land owners, county and state.

LITTER AND VANDALISM

With the public availability of the property more visitors and people will be using the property. As they travel to, use and exit the property litter and vandalism will become more pronounced then is currently occurring.

FWP is sensitive to the possibility for littering on and access point(s) to and from the State Park/WMA. In order to mitigate this problem, FWP would implement the following actions:

LITTER

- Strongly promote Leave no Trace outdoor ethics through education and outreach programs.
- Implement a pack it in – pack it out policy on the undeveloped portions of the property.
- Provide garbage receptacles in the primary visitor use and campground areas.
- Aggressively enforce and prosecute littering laws.
- Park and WMA staff and volunteers will routinely police up litter on the property and along the primary access road.

FWP is aware and sensitive to the problems and costs associated with vandalism. In order to minimize and/or mitigate for vandalism problems FWP would implement the following actions:

VANDALISM

- Staff and volunteers will conduct routine patrols.
- Aggressive enforcement and prosecution of vandalism violations.

FIRE MANAGEMENT

This area is prone to fire danger. The EA has not addressed how fire threats will be addressed? Will the WMA be closed during periods of high fire danger? Has FWP been in contact with Pondera and Toole Counties? What is FWP's liability in the event of a fire on the WMA and/or State Park?

- FWP is sensitive to the possibility of human and/or natural caused wildland fires starting in the Park/WMA and spreading to adjacent private lands. In order to mitigate this problem FWP would implement the following actions:

- Implement and enforce campfire regulations that restrict fires to designated steel fire grates in official camping and picnic areas only.
- Impose appropriate fire hazard restrictions consistent with surrounding jurisdictions as conditions warrant.
- Work closely and cooperatively with local, County, and State SST / DNRC fire suppression programs to ensure adequate wildland fire response capabilities on the property.
- Implement hazard fuel reduction and fire-break construction on an as needed basis, use of a grazing program to reduce fuels, and provide training to staff for both prevention and initial response.

FWP properties that are not covered under direct fire protection by a wildland agency are covered by the county under a cooperative agreement with the state. The county agrees to provide protection to all non-forest district state properties in exchange for the state providing the county with training, equipment, and some planning assistance. FWP makes payments in lieu of taxes (PILT) to counties on all FWP properties except State Parks, Fish Hatcheries, Bird Farms, and in counties where FWP owns less than 100 acres. The state also agrees to assist the county.

During the fire season, FWP attends weekly fire conferences with County, State, and Federal entities to discuss the current fire danger and assess appropriate actions relative to potential fire restrictions. These restrictions may include closure of the site to public use.

Standard fire protections/restrictions will apply to all picnic/camping areas. Camping will only occur within designated and established camping locations that are specially 'hardened' to accommodate safe public use. Please see the Preliminary Management Plan for more detail.

The following statute covers liability issues:

MCA 50-63-103. Liability of offender for damages and costs. A person who sets or leaves a fire that spreads and damages or destroys property of any kind not belonging to the person is liable for all damages caused by the fire, and an owner of property damaged or destroyed by the fire may maintain a civil suit for the purpose of recovering damages. A person who sets or leaves a fire that threatens to spread and damage or destroy property is liable for all costs and expenses

incurred, including but not limited to expenses incurred in investigation of the fire and administration of fire suppression, by the state of Montana, by any forestry association, or by any person extinguishing or preventing the spread of the fire.

ENFORCEMENT

How will FWP ensure that the property and the neighbors are not subjected to trespass, crime and vandalism?

The Region 4 Enforcement Division has field wardens, ex-officio wardens, a warden sergeant and a warden captain that proactively patrol and are available for call-out.

The law enforcement officers from the Region 4 Enforcement Division staff regularly communicate and work with the County Sheriff's Offices. The Counties have historically been responsive to Fish, Wildlife, and Parks enforcement concerns; both proactively and when immediate warden responses are unavailable.

While FWP wardens have law enforcement responsibilities on a broad landscape, FWP lands, Block Management Areas, and areas that concentrate the recreational public receive an increased department and law enforcement presence.

TRESPASS

FWP is highly sensitive to the possibility of visitors trespassing onto adjacent private lands or trespass through private land to access the State Park/WMA. In order to minimize and mitigate this problem FWP would implement the following actions:

- Fencing and signing of the Park/WMA's external boundaries.
- Aggressively enforce and prosecute trespass violations.
- Have periodic and strategic law enforcement presence on site to deter and to patrol for trespass activity.

CURRENT STATE OF PROPERTY

The EA misleads the reader to presume that this property is pristine. What will happen to the on-site buildings? The EA does not reflect the cultural and historic presence of native peoples nor early settlers.

The current owner has leased out grazing rights on deeded acres with no formal grazing scheme assigned. All habitats reflect continuous livestock grazing patterns to the detriment of vegetation condition and class. No cross-fencing exists within the property, thus making livestock handling and distribution a challenge. Exterior fencing (of which there is an estimated 25 miles) varies in condition from almost new to in-need-of-repair to entirely absent. Fencing needs will be evaluated and problem areas will be addressed as needed and in consultation with and participation from adjacent landowner(s).

As a State Park and Wildlife Management Area, opportunities will be explored in the future to discover, document and interpret the historical presence of all peoples on the landscape as represented by this property. Further investigation and documentation of

the 5 buildings (Mr. Lincoln's house and associated outbuildings) remaining on the property will be undertaken. Their historic value will be considered and further plans for their preservation and/or disposal will be made according to State Preservation standards.

WEED MANAGEMENT

The EA does not adequately identify the extent of weeds (in particular leafy spurge), nor how FWP plans to address management of weeds to ensure that weeds are not spread to neighboring properties.

Weeds will be managed under the auspices of the Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan. The plan guides the agency's annual \$600,000 noxious weed management program. FWP's noxious weed management efforts target exotic plant species capable of harming native plant communities and making land unfit for agriculture, forestry, livestock, wildlife, and other beneficial uses. Noxious weeds are generally identified by the Montana Department of Agriculture and Montana Noxious Weed List Advisory Committee.

Currently, the property has an expansive infestation of leafy spurge along the Marias River bottomlands. Russian and spotted knapweed are also noted as having broad distribution across the property. If the Proposed Action is selected, and a successful sale completed, FWP would assess the property for weeds, and initiate an integrated weed management plan. Weed management will involve using techniques that will have minimal impacts to fish and wildlife habitat will be used. These could include chemical, mechanical and/or biological means of control and management.

COST OF MANAGEMENT / TAXES

The EA has not addressed how management of the property will be funded, nor does it adequately address how expensive managing property of this size may become. Tax revenues for county must not be diminished and County Commissioners request that taxes generated from the property are not lost if property becomes publicly owned.

FWP currently manages 71 Wildlife Management Areas, and the Parks system consists of 51 State Parks, 12 affiliated lands, and approximately 316 fishing access sites. This experience combined with a commitment to secure adequate funding for management by the Wildlife and Parks Divisions within FWP will ensure that the property is maintained in the desired (and improved) condition, and that well regulated recreational opportunities are abundant. The Lincoln Ranch will be a high priority for Wildlife and Parks additional funding in the upcoming biennium (starting July 1, 2008).

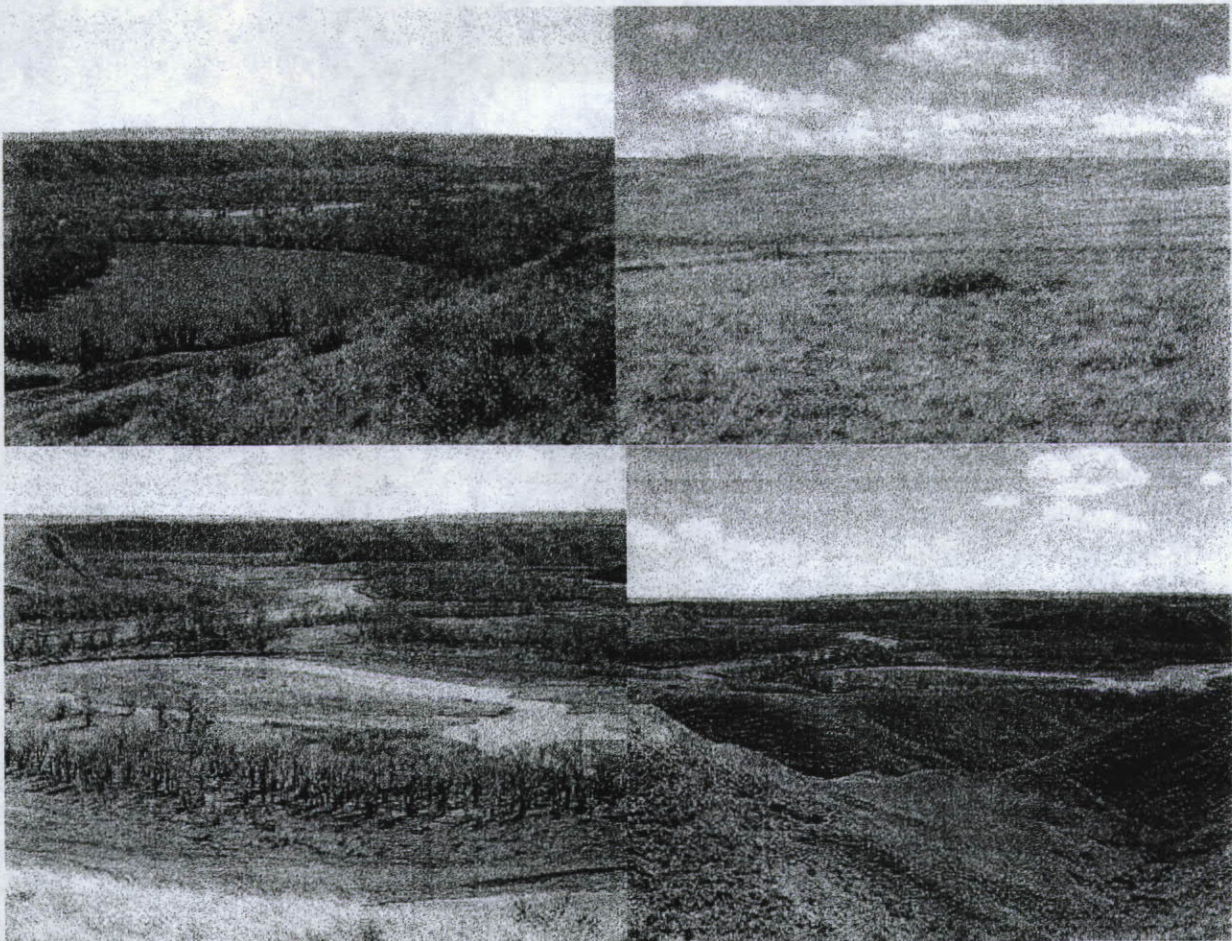
On Wildlife Management Areas, FWP makes payments in lieu of taxes (PILT) to local governments for special improvement districts (SIDs) and other lands, at a rate equal to what a private landowner would pay in traditional property taxes. FWP makes such payments when total holdings of Wildlife Management Areas and Fishing Access Sites

in a county exceed 100 acres, which is the case in Toole and Pondera Counties. FWP does not make payments for State Parks (or those acres so identified), and affiliated Parks lands, most office buildings, or fish hatcheries.

DRAFT Environmental Assessment

Lincoln Ranch Acquisition

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 4
Habitat Montana & State Parks Access Montana
Proposed Project



June 2008



PREFACE

In 2007, local rancher and wilderness enthusiast, Charlie Lincoln passed away. In his estate, he bequeathed his ranch to the Archdiocese of Helena with the stipulation that if the Archdiocese decided to sell the ranch, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) would be given the right of first refusal to meet the highest offer.

Mr. Lincoln's ranch incorporates a variety of habitats supporting numerous game and non-game species, fourteen miles of the Marias River still in a natural free flowing state with a variety of native and sport fish species, unique geological and cultural resources, and recreational potential for diverse users groups. The most obvious feature of this property is the undeveloped, natural conditions found throughout. There are few if any river bottom properties like this left in north-central Montana. The contiguous size absent of development, owned on both sides of a major river, and the virtually unchanged pre- European landscape is rare. FWP has prepared this environmental assessment in the likelihood FWP exercises its right to purchase and proceed with acquisition.

1.0 PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1 Proposed Action And Need

FWP proposes the acquisition of approximately 7,540 acres in fee title and continued leasing of 1,325 contiguous acres of important wildlife habitat along the Marias River. The Lincoln Ranch encompasses riparian, sagebrush-grassland and cottonwood gallery forest habitat communities that support an abundance of game and non-game species. The Marias River meanders through the property with numerous oxbows. Aquatic habitat favors many native and non-native fish species. If FWP acquires this property, recreational uses are almost unlimited. Fishing, hunting, river recreation, developed and semi-primitive camping, hiking, cultural and natural history interpretation, wildlife viewing, and other possible compatible uses would provide Montanans and visitors unique recreational opportunities. The wide range and quality of recreational opportunities in one location is rare and will provide Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks an exceptional opportunity to co-manage natural and recreational resources.

In addition to the open space on the ranch, this acquisition would provide public access to 1,840 acres of currently inaccessible, adjacent public lands owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Department of Natural Resource Conservation (DNRC).

The property would be purchased with funds from a variety of sources including the FWP Habitat Montana Program, State Parks Access funds, various non-governmental organizations, and conservation and sportsman groups. All have committed to assist FWP in the purchase and to add this property to public ownership. A final price will not be set until a bid process has been completed.

Imminent threat exists to this pristine area because of the property's scenic location enveloping the Marias River and in view of the Rocky Mountains; accordingly this ranch has caught the attention of developers and private investors. If those individuals purchased the property for

development of exclusive private use, the public could be excluded from access to an area with abundant public natural resources and recreational opportunities.

1.2 Objectives

In proposing to acquire the Lincoln Ranch, FWP seeks to meet the following needs:

- Protect and enhance riparian, sagebrush grasslands, and cottonwood gallery habitats;
- Protect in perpetuity 14 miles of the Marias River and its water-borne resources;
- Manage wildlife and fisheries habitat in a sustainable manner to support priority fish and wildlife species;
- Propose reestablishment of fish species native to the Marias River;
- Provide public access to over 10,700 acres of continuous habitat that is currently inaccessible for recreational uses;
- Provide opportunity and access for public hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking, non-motorized boating, and opportunity for other public recreational users;
- Protect wildlife habitat and fisheries resource from incompatible land uses or development and potentially loss of public access to those resources;
- Promote a river and ground based state park that provides multiple levels and options of recreational opportunities;
- Develop and provide educational interpretive programs that promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation, preservation of important natural and cultural resources, and appreciation of park values;
- Promote tourism through recreation opportunities that will benefit local communities;
- Identify and preserve important cultural, heritage, geologic, and paleontologic resources;
- Manage as a cooperative and combined WMA and State Park.

1.3 Location

Located 8 miles southwest of Shelby and 70 miles northwest of Great Falls in Pondera and Toole Counties, the Property falls within FWP administrative Region 4. See Figure 1 for overview map of property and Figure 2 for aerial photo showing property boundary.

1.4 Landownership

The property consists of 8,866 contiguous acres (7,540 deeded, 492 state school trust, and 833 acres BLM) on both the north and south sides of the Marias River. There are approximately 14 miles of river frontage on the Marias River within the property. See *Appendix A* for an aerial map of the ranch. The ranch is bordered on the south and west by an additional 588 acres of currently inaccessible State School Trust land. See Figure 2 for overview of adjacent property ownership.

1.5 Legal Descriptions

Pondera County		
Township, Range	Section	Legal Description
T31NR03W	8	Lot 2
T31NR03W	16	LOT 14, S2SW4
T31NR03W	17	LOTS 4,5,7,8,10,11,13,14, S2SE4
T31NR03W	18	LOTS 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, SW4NE4, E2SW4, W2SE4, NE4SE4
T31NR03W	21	SE4SW4, S2SE4
T31NR04W	13	LOTS 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, E2SE4
T31NR04W	14	LOTS 4, 7, 10, 11
Toole County		
Township, Range	Section	Legal Description
T31NR03W	4	W2
T31NR03W	5	S2NE4, W2, SE4
T31NR03W	6	SE4NE4, E2SE4
T31NR03W	7	SW4NE4, S2NW4, S2
T31NR03W	8	N2, N2SW4, SW4SW4, LOT 3, N2SE4, LOT 1, SE4SE4
T31NR03W	9	W2NE4, NW4, S2
T31NR03W	10	SW4
T31NR03W	14	SW4SW4
T31NR03W	15	LOTS 1-8, NW4, NW4SW4, W2NE4SE4
T31NR03W	16	LOTS 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 12, 15, N2NE4, SE4NE4, NE4SE4
T31NR03W	17	LOTS 2, 3, 6 & 9
T31NR03W	18	LOTS 1, 2, 4, 5, 7
T31NR03W	22	LOTS 1-8,10, W2SE4, SE4SE4, SW4NW4, SW4SW4
T31NR03W	23	S2NE4, NW4, NE4SW4, NW4SE4
T31NR03W	24	LOT 10, SW4NW4
T31NR03W	26	LOT 4
T31NR03W	27	LOTS 1,3,4
T31NR04W	10	S2SE4
T31NR04W	11	S2
T31NR04W	12	W2SW4, NE4SE4, S2SE4
T31NR04W	13	LOTS 1-3, 6, 7, 9, 10, NW4NE4, NE4NW4, S2NW4
T31NR04W	14	LOTS 1-3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 15, N2NW4
T31NR04W	15	LOT 1
T31NR04W	23	LOT 1
T31NR04W	24	LOT 2

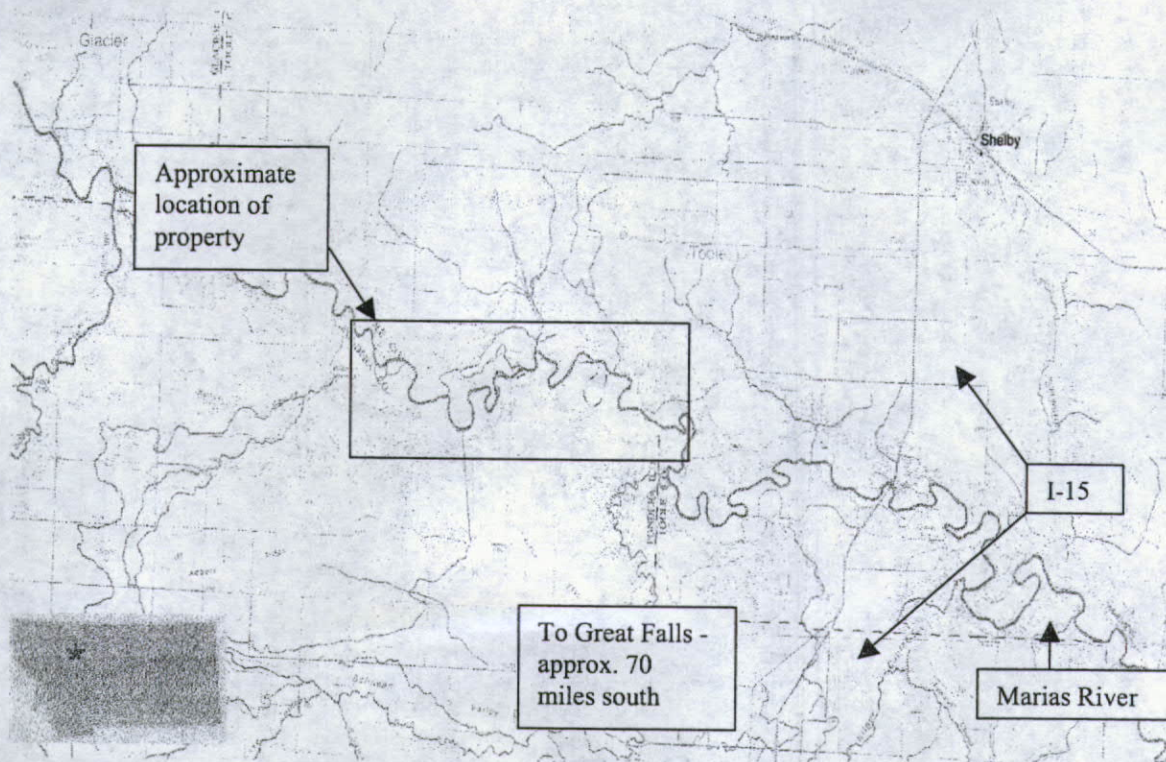


Figure 1: Overview Map of Subject Property

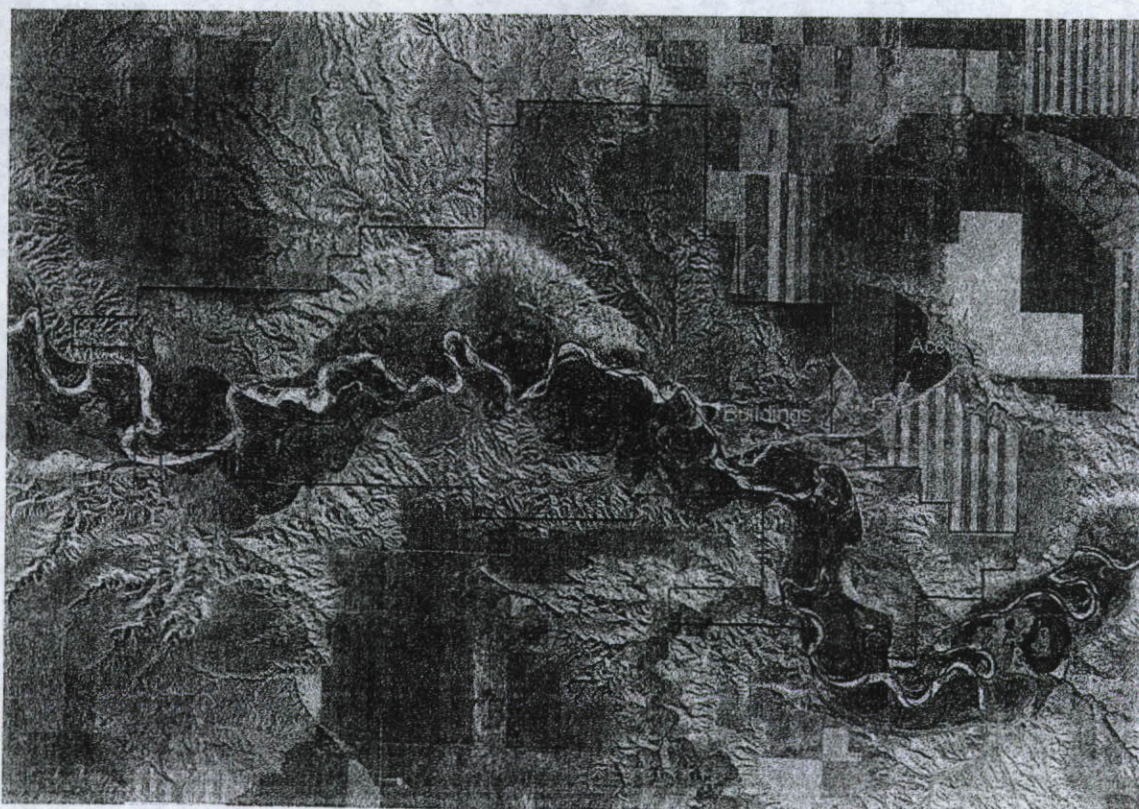


Figure 2: Aerial Photo of Subject Property

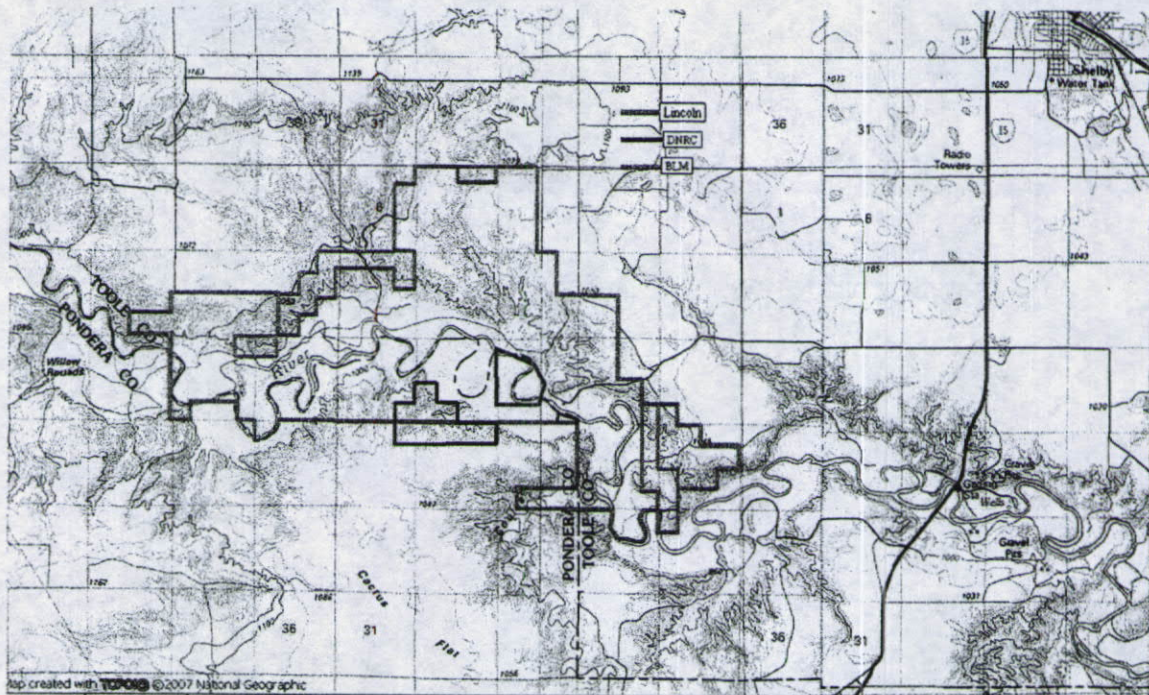


Figure 3: Overview of Adjacent Property Ownership

1.6 Application to FWP Habitat Montana Program

Habitat Montana is the Wildlife Division Program created by the 1987 Montana Legislature (HB526) to provide means to protect and enhance important ecological and wildlife habitats throughout Montana. It features three important habitat types as those in most need of protection. They include intermountain foothill, sagebrush-grassland, and riparian habitat types. The Lincoln Ranch clearly offers exceptional opportunity to protect and enhance the riparian and sagebrush-grassland communities. Significant funding for this project will be derived from the Habitat Montana Program.

1.7 Application to Access Montana State Parks Program

Multiple recreational opportunities and access to public lands are all consistent with the State Parks "Access Montana" legislation. Potential for scenic trails, a state park aligned with 14 miles of the Marias river corridor, significant cultural and historic features found throughout the property, and access to large block of public state and federal lands are why Parks Access Montana Funds may be utilized. FWP's Parks Division is authorized by MCA 23-1-102 and 23-1-107 wherein FWP authority and duty is defined regarding the acquisition of lands by fee or donation as state historic sites and recreation areas.

1.8 Application to FWP Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Management Strategy

There are three community types within the property that have been identified in the Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Management Strategy (CFWCS, FWP 2005), Terrestrial Focus Area Montana Glaciated Plains as Community Types of Greatest Conservation Need. Those communities are riparian and wetland, mixed broadleaf, and sagebrush-grassland (Grassland Complexes).

Riparian and wetland communities support the highest concentration of plants and animals in Montana. This property contains fourteen linear miles of high quality riparian habitat along the Marias River. The mixed broadleaf forest is represented by the approximately 1,500 acres of unaltered cottonwood gallery. Thousands of acres of sagebrush-grassland habitat exist on the property.

There are over 300 vertebrate species found within the grasslands community type throughout Montana. The CFWCS lists the following Tier I Species of Greatest Conservation Need that may be found in mixed shrub and grassland communities: northern leopard frog, western hog-nosed snake, milksnake, greater sage-grouse, mountain plover, long-billed curlew, burrowing owl, spotted bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, pallid bat, black-tailed prairie dog, and meadow jumping mouse (FWP 2005).

In Montana, riparian habitats provide breeding and nesting areas for at least 134 (55%) of Montana's 245 species of breeding birds, as well as much-needed food and resting areas for migrating birds. There are 17 Tier I Species of Greatest Conservation Need that rely on riparian and wetland habitat for breeding and/or survival.

The unique diversity of these three community types provides habitats potentially supporting over two hundred species within the boundary of a single property.

The table below lists the CFWCS Tier1 species that are predicted to occur in the area of the property:

Common Name	Scientific Name
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>
Mountain Plover	<i>Charadrius montanus</i>
Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>
Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>
Olive-sided Flycatcher	<i>Contopus cooperi</i>
Spotted Bat	<i>Euderma maculatum</i>
Townsend's Big-eared Bat	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>
Pallid Bat	<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>
Meadow Jumping Mouse	<i>Zapus hudsonius</i>
Snapping Turtle	<i>Chelydra serpentine</i>
Spiny Softshell Turtle	<i>Apalone spinifera</i>
Western Hog-nosed Snake	<i>Heterodon nasicus</i>
Milksnake	<i>Lampropeltis triangulum</i>
Burbot	<i>Lota lota</i>

The table below lists the proportion of the property that fall within the various CFWCS Tier 1 Community Types:

Type	% Area
Riparian Wetland	31
Mixed Broadleaf (Cottonwood gallery)	10
Sagebrush & Grassland	59
Total	100

1.9 Authority

Three divisions (Fisheries, Parks, and Wildlife) of FWP are working together to assist in the management of and are providing the funds for proposed acquisition. Below is a summary of the applicable laws and rules that come into practice with the proposed action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) undertakes this action by authority of MCA 23-1-102, defining FWP powers and duties regarding the acquisition of lands by fee or donation as state historical sites and recreation areas. The department may cooperate with other federal, state or local agencies to acquire, plan, establish, and maintain parks as authorized by MCA 23-1-107.

The Habitat Montana Program (12.9.509 ARM) seeks to acquire properties in order to conserve land, water and wildlife, to contribute to hunting and fishing opportunities, to contribute to non-hunting recreation, to protect open space and scenic areas, and to maintain the local tax base through payments in lieu.

FWP has the authority to purchase lands (MCA 87.1.209) that are suitable for game, bird, fish or fur-bearing animal restoration, propagation or protection; for public hunting, fishing, or trapping areas; and for state parks and outdoor recreation.

1.10 Management Considerations

Three divisions of FWP are expected to be involved with the management of the property. They are Fisheries, Parks and Wildlife. In the interest of protecting the natural and cultural resources within the property and clarifying often differing divisional goals for newly purchased FWP lands, a site management plan will be developed to articulate the cooperative management vision for the ranch.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Alternative A – Proposed Action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to exercise its' right of first refusal to purchase 7,540 acres in fee title and retain the current leases to 492 acres of state trust lands and 833 acres of BLM lands. FWP will negotiate lease agreements with both BLM and DNRC that will be agreeable and compatible with land uses of all parties. This project would conserve an important wildlife habitat area that includes riparian, sagebrush-grasslands and cottonwood gallery zones.

2.2 Alternative B – No Action:

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not exercise its' right of first refusal to pursue this acquisition, and would forgo the opportunity to purchase the Lincoln River Ranch. The Archdiocese of Helena would then sell the property to the highest bidder, likely being either a private investor or developer.

2.3 Alternatives C – Third Party Purchase with a FWP Conservation Easement:

Other private parties have expressed interest in this property. If the fee title purchase price of the property exceeds FWP's financial resources, FWP will investigate the possibility of collaboratively purchasing a conservation easement with the new owners provided interests of both parties could be met. FWP has established a long, effective and consistent track record of working with private landowners to protect and enhance important wildlife habitats while simultaneously maintaining private operating and productive ranches on the Montana landscape. If suitable terms of protection and use can be negotiated, it is conceivable that passage of the Lincoln Ranch into private ownership can be facilitated while simultaneously protecting important resource and recreational values on the property. Provisions of the Lincoln Will do not directly allow for or direct such an effort. Any such effort and result will be at the consent of the new private landowner.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Habitat

The three focus habitat types on this property are riparian and wetland, sagebrush grassland, and cottonwood gallery. The multi-layered plant canopy provided along the Marias River corridor provides a variety of nesting, resting, and foraging areas for wildlife.

The riparian habitat is very high quality with extensive stands of cottonwoods, intermixed with willow, buffalo berry, and other shrubs that surround the free flowing Marias River. There are 4 freshwater ponds within the property, which were created by old river oxbows, which provide ideal waterfowl breeding and brood rearing areas. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wetland Database notes the property encompasses approximately 22 acres of freshwater forested/shrub wetland and approximately 127 acres of freshwater emergent wetland. The Marias River is a naturally functioning, unregulated river that contains both cool and cold-water fish species.

The sagebrush-grassland habitat in the uplands is extensive and high quality. Managed grazing has resulted in range conditions that are fair to good. The primary species are needle grass, wheatgrass, and blue grama with some sagebrush. Uplands consist of "breaks" interspersed with open bench lands. There are several drainages that are ideal escape terrain for mule deer.

There is approximately 16 acres that were historically tilled for alfalfa fields, but those have not been cultivated for approximately 30 years. Smooth brome is now present in those areas, thus offering opportunities in the future for renovation and restoration.

Current Condition of Habitat: Upland habitat is currently in fair to good condition. River bottom habitats are structurally complete, but show the effects of long term and continuous grazing practices. Boundary fences are in fair condition and will require immediate attention to address proper livestock grazing distribution on and off of the property. Interior fences are rare. Where present, they are generally in total disrepair.

In the river bottom and historically cultivated areas, noxious weeds are present. Leafy spurge is present throughout the floodplain corridor. Drier upland sites and travel corridors host spotted knapweed in localized situations. Other noxious weeds have yet to be identified and mapped.

3.2 Terrestrial Species

Currently, the Property provides habitat for at least 200 white-tailed deer, 200 mule deer, abundant pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, Hungarian partridge, and less common, wild turkeys. The riparian vegetation community may provide nesting, resting, and foraging habitat for up to 134 native species of birds. The rocky outcrops along the river provide unique and finite habitat resources for many species of bats, birds and reptiles, including Townsend's big-eared bat, Northern myotis, milk snake, burrowing owls, and prairie falcons. Full inventory and monitoring efforts have yet to be undertaken to identify the presence of other potentially unidentified species

3.3 Aquatic Species

The Marias River is a naturally functioning, unregulated river that is inhabited by both cool and cold-water fish species. Sport fish present include burbot, northern pike, yellow perch, rainbow trout, brown trout, channel catfish, and walleye. Numerous non-game species known to be present include various minnow species, sculpin, longnose sucker, and white sucker. The river's riparian areas host numerous shorebirds, songbirds, waterfowl and amphibians, including the plains spadefoot and Great Plains toad.

3.4 Current Recreation Opportunities

Current public recreation opportunities are essentially nonexistent. The property was managed for the exclusive use of the owner. The potential for public recreation is tremendous. Variety of habitats and terrain features make this an exceptional area for many types of outdoor experiences.

3.5 Public Access

Currently two access routes to the property exist; one is on the northeastern corner and the other is on the northwestern corner. The eastern most access point is via Lincoln Road, a designated Toole County Road. The status of a public right of way to the Lincoln Ranch property is being researched to assure this will provide unrestricted public entry to the property.

The western most access point is a Limited Use Easement through private property. At this time FWP is researching the limits of this easement as it pertains to public use. FWP will utilize all options to assure unrestricted public access is available to the property along one of the current points of entry or research other access point where public use is unrestricted. If public access cannot be obtained FWP will not acquire the property.

3.6 Buildings and Utilities

There are five buildings on the property, which includes a rustic residence, a pole barn, and 3 sheds. These buildings may not be in suitable condition for public use; they are in need of serious maintenance, repair or removal. All these buildings are located in close proximity to one another near the county road.

There are 4 producing gas wells and 2 abandoned/plugged on the property. Mr. Lincoln allowed the extraction activities and tapped into the resource for his domestic residential needs. All rights to develop and extract gas are held by other third party interests.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The following environmental analysis is limited to Alternative A (Preferred Action) and Alternative B (No Action). The reason for this is FWP does not know who the new owner would be (single purchaser vs. developer), what their plans for the property would be, and if they would be interested in entering into a conservation easement. Attempting to assess the anticipated environmental impacts for Alternative C with out additional information would be extremely difficult.

Traditionally, FWP's conservation easements look toward reaching a balance between the conservation of the property's natural resources (FWP's vision) and the property owner's objectives. Often FWP's conservation easements include language that prohibits activities that would negatively impact a specific species or specific habitat type for preservation and enhancement of open space, native plants and animals located on the Land, as well as the scenic values of the Land, but often these limitations do not interfere with the owner's normal activities on the property such as rest-rotation livestock grazing and crop production.

If FWP and the new owners agreed to a conservation easement, another environmental assessment would be prepared addressing that action and its impacts to the existing natural resources, since the environmental consequences are not know at this time.

4.1 Physical Environment

4.1.1 Land Resources

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action, there would be localized changes to the land resources (soils, geologic features, etc.) within the property. Potentially with the increased public access to an area that historically allow minimum public use, the indirect consequences of FWP obtaining the property could be a rise in soil disturbing activities by those visiting the site and moving into pristine areas (i.e. pioneering new trails). Because of the sandy and clay loam qualities of the soil, potentially new erosion patterns could easily be established, which could degrade exposed areas. FWP will attempt to discourage such actions through identification of authorized recreation activities with informational signs. FWP, under a management plan would develop a restricted foot print for a State Park, potential defined access areas and parking areas for hunting, fishing and other recreational users, and any livestock grazing will be strictly managed to reduce the risk of weed spread and other habitat degradation along riparian areas. In the near future, FWP anticipates development of recreational facilities that could include a campgrounds, visitor center, boat ramp, office, and staff residence. Prior to any such development, FWP will complete a separate environmental analysis of potential affects of any proposed development. Vegetative enhancements planned under the proposed action may decrease potential erosion.

No Action: Under the No Action Alternative, there is a high degree of likelihood that this property will be sold to a buyer that plans to either subdivide the acreage or maintain it solely for private recreational and other land based activities. Either of those plans would likely include soil-disturbing activities for construction of residences and/or new roads.

4.1.2 Air Quality

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action, there would be direct no changes to the ambient air quality. However, a potential indirect impact of FWP obtaining the property would be a minor increase in dust created by road travel to or within the parcel by FWP staff and visitors. FWP would provide appropriate maintenance to the road within the property to ensure public safety and when appropriate, apply dust-reducing elements to the road surface to reduce dust production. Currently, the only public access road into the property is located very close to a private residence and dust production and reduction will likely be a concern of that owner.

No Action: Under the No Action Alternative, potentially the property's new owner could allow for land uses that could have negative effects to air quality, including construction of additional roads or the cultivation of new agricultural areas.

4.1.3 Water Resources

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action, water resources on or adjacent to this parcel will be maintained or enhanced by protecting riparian areas. There are no proposed changes that would result in increased discharge, changes in drainage patterns, alteration of the river course (including flooding), development in the floodplain, changes in the quality or quantity of groundwater. Existing water rights would be evaluated and if changes in water rights were proposed, a change process that protects other water users from adverse effects would be a

required process to complete. This includes the resources of Bull Creek (perennial stream), four freshwater ponds, and associated wetland areas of the Marias River.

No Action Alternative: If FWP decides not to exercise its right to purchase the property, it is unknown if any of the water resources (ponds, riparian areas) would be affected by the another buyer's plans.

4.1.4 Vegetation

Proposed Action: If FWP were to exercise its right to acquire the Lincoln Ranch, direct impacts to the current vegetation would be limited. The changes would focus primarily upon the control of noxious weeds, in particular leafy spurge. Currently there are approximately 20% of the total acres infected by leafy spurge. FWP would immediately implement its regional weed management plan to reduce the distribution and spread of noxious weeds by use of chemical, biological (i.e. insects, sheep, goats), and mechanical means. FWP would work with county weed district managers to initiate any weed control processes. By state law, FWP is required to manage noxious weeds on its properties. As a result of these measures, the quantity and quality of native vegetation on the land parcel is expected to improve.

Previously noted, the ranch included a limited number of acres allocated for the cultivation of alfalfa that because of neglect has been taken over by smooth brome. If FWP were to acquire the property, a potential management strategy on the property could include sharecropping of the historically cultivated areas. This would provide an economic benefit to the farmer and provide additional forage and cover for upland game birds and wildlife. Cultivated areas may show a decrease in noxious weed infestations.

Indirect impacts of the proposed action could be the spread of noxious weeds into additional areas by recreationists using the property, as well as the disturbance of native vegetation when visitors pioneer trails into the property's interior or in wetland areas in order to access the river.

No Action: By not exercising their right for purchasing the property, FWP could put a unique habitat community at risk of development that could negatively impact the vegetative resources on the ranch. The exact level of this risk is unknown since the future impacts to resources would be dependent on the desires of the property's new owner. The level of noxious weed control by another owner is unknown.

4.1.5 Fish & Wildlife Resources

Proposed Action: If FWP were to acquire the Lincoln ranch, management of the property would be for the benefit of its permanent and transient aquatic and terrestrial species. Direct impacts to species are expected to be minimal since FWP does not plan to implement any immediate changes to wetland, shrub or grassland habitats that would change the diversity of wildlife. However, long term improvements in habitat and management actions could increase the carrying capacity of wildlife species. Historically, hunting and trapping was allowed on the property on a limited basis. FWP would continue to permit these practices on a regulated basis. FWP will investigate the reintroduction of native fish species currently absent from this reach of the Marias River. This includes the blue sucker, river carpsucker, and shovelnose sturgeon. Fishing would be permitted on the property.

Indirect impacts of the proposed acquisition would be the likelihood FWP would repair boundary fencing that could be a minor impediment to migrating ungulates. Fences built would be of a wildlife friendly design. As part of its management plan for the property, FWP would encourage community-based groups to provide the hands-on presence to discourage unauthorized activities.

No Action: Due to the likelihood of development of this land parcel, aquatic and wildlife resources may be negatively impacted but at what level is unknown.

4.2 Human Environment

4.2.1 Noise and Electrical Effects

Proposed Action: The proposed acquisition may result in more people visiting the site, thus increasing the noise level within a localized area since the majority of the property is inaccessible by motorized vehicle. The proposed action will not create electrostatic effects that could be detrimental to human health or interfere with radio or television reception.

No Action: The potential for another buyer purchasing the property could result in development of the property, which could increase noise and electrical effects in the area.

4.2.2 Land Use

Proposed Action: Past and present, the Lincoln Ranch was/is an operating ranch for livestock production. Current livestock use is on a lease basis through estate management. Under the Proposed Action, the area will be maintained as a natural area with increased public access with Land use changes will reflect both wildlife habitat enhancement and protection, State Park development, limited grazing, and diverse public recreational uses. Development may include a State Park campground with support facilities (Maintenance Shop, developed camp pads and parking areas, staff office and living quarters). Interpretive and cultural areas will have access trails and developed displays. Wildlife areas may include food plots to enhance specific wildlife species abundance, weed control to reduce impacts to native plant species, riparian habitat enhancement and limited hunter access corridors which may include parking areas.

Opportunities to continue or adjust livestock production on the Property will be explored. The proposed acquisition would not directly impact land uses of neighboring properties. Since there is the possible increase of traffic to the property, there could be minor negative impact to the nearest neighbor's residence because of dust and noise from passing vehicles, which would be addressed through management practices to minimize impacts to neighbors. Recreational use of the adjacent BLM and state trust lands would increase as a result of the acquisition by FWP providing access to those lands. Would we continue the BLM & DNRC grazing leases or just provide recreational access?

No Action: If another buyer than FWP were to acquire the ranch, the land use may change into a more developed area with potentially multiple private residences or new areas under cultivation. These activities could pose threats to wildlife and native vegetative resources, but at what level those threats would occur are unknown.

4.2.3 Risk and Health Hazards

Proposed Action: Under FWP management, pesticides could be used to reduce or eradicate noxious weeds on the property, as per the Region 4 Weed Management Plan. Trained, licensed professionals would conduct any weed treatment and storage/use of chemicals in accordance with proper operating procedures and label instructions to minimize potential unintended consequences to wildlife, vegetation, and visitors to the property.

As common practice, FWP would carry out a hazardous materials survey before completing the purchase of the property to identify any unseen public safety or wildlife hazards present on the property.

The Marias River bottom is within an active floodplain. FWP would not propose development of the river bottom where there was the potential of flooding or risks to public safety and will commit to maintaining natural channel function where no hard techniques of bank stabilization such as riprap will be utilized.

Inherent risks are associated with public recreation on a free flowing river. FWP would monitor the Marias River for significant hazards and provide educational materials and resources that promote safe and responsible river recreation.

No Action: If FWP did not purchase the property, it is unknown if any new risk or health hazards might occur.

4.2.4 Aesthetics, Community Impact & Recreation

Proposed Action: FWP acquisition of the ranch will protect the open space and viewshed of this portion of the Marias River corridor. Mr. Lincoln appreciated the scenic beauty and primitive values of his property, so the protection of this picturesque area would be in keeping with his vision.

Initially, it is expected that there would be minimal direct impacts to nearby communities (i.e. Shelby and Conrad). However, indirect impacts of the acquisition by FWP might be an increase in recreation-based or visitor businesses to accommodate the needs of the visitors accessing or recreating on the property.

New access to approximately 10,000 acres of public lands will greatly increase the potential for recreational activities at the property. For the immediate future, FWP would likely authorize the following recreational activities on a regulated basis on the property: hiking, angling, floating, horseback trail rides on designated trails, natural history exploration, photography, wildlife viewing, hunting, and trapping. Trapping (otter, bobcat, muskrat, beaver, and mink) and hunting (ungulates and game bird) activities had been allowed by Mr. Lincoln but only on a very limited basis. Trapping and hunting actions would follow FWP established rules and regulations.

Increased visitation and diverse recreational opportunities may result in social and experiential issues and potential user conflicts. FWP will strive to mitigate these potential impacts by applying a visitor use management program.

Activities associated with the State Park may require user fees in accordance with the State Parks Biennial Fee Rule. These fees would provide important earned revenue to support the State Park program.

Activities that meet the criteria for FWP Commercial Use Rules ARM 12.14.101 would also be regulated and fees assessed according to those rules.

Additionally, with opening any new area to public use, there is the potential for vandalism. Vandalism diminishes aesthetic and recreation values of any property on which it occurs. As previously noted, FWP will likely establish a community-based group to monitor the site and provide an on-site presence to deter unauthorized activities from occurring.

No Action: There is the potential for a small, short-term economic benefit through housing construction and real estate sales if the property was sold to a developer for ranchettes. Changes in ownership may result in changes to the natural areas.

4.2.5 Public Services, Taxes & Utilities

Proposed Action: There would be minimal changes or need for increased public services in the property if FWP purchased the ranch. The existing natural gas extraction continues per the lease agreement. Mineral rights for oil and gas would remain with owners that have the subsurface rights. FWP would make property tax payments to Pondera and Toole Counties for fee title lands that are designated as a Wildlife Management Area. In 2007, the ranch paid \$754.79 to Pondera County and \$2,494.42 to Toole County. These amounts could decrease depending on the acreage of the property designated as a State Park.

Increased public recreational activities on the property could result in occasional need for emergency services such as search and rescue, emergency medical services, local law enforcement, and fire control and suppression.

Recreational activity on the property could result in the occasional need for emergency services such as search and rescue or emergency medical services administered through the County Sheriff.

No Action: If another buyer purchased the Lincoln Ranch under a possible subdivision development scenario, Pondera and/or Toole Counties may receive increased tax revenues in exchange for increased public services to new residences and new utility services. These services may be of some detriment to some wildlife species. However, the exact public service and utility needs of another buyer is unknown.

4.2.6 Cultural & Historical Resources

Proposed Action: If the sale of the property to FWP were completed, there would be no direct affects to cultural or historic resources on the property. A file search at the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) found there were no known recorded historic sites within the ranch. However, local knowledge of the property does acknowledge the Blackfeet Indians used the area for wintering sites. Tipi rings can be found on the bluffs above the river. Additionally, Meriwether Lewis crossed the Marias River in the area while fleeing the Blackfeet in 1806. Finally, the building used by Mr. Lincoln as a residence is recorded as being built in 1940.

According to SHPO, buildings over 50-years are considered historic and thus it is potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Indirect influences to cultural and historic sites within the property could encompass unauthorized artifact extractions and vandalism to the residence. FWP would attempt to discourage such activities by signage and community-based monitoring of the Property. Additionally, FWP may decide to remove the buildings because they are found to be unstable, pose public safety issues, and obsolete. FWP would consult with SHPO before removing the house to facilitate the process of removal and/or documenting its historic values.

No Action: It is uncertain if unrecorded historic sites would be affected by the activities of another owner than FWP.

4.3 Potential Long Term Impacts

If FWP were successful in purchasing the Lincoln Ranch, FWP would likely develop small, isolated parcels so that they may accommodate a visitor contact station, designated camping area, and interpretive sign, boat ramp for non-motorized floating activities, and primitive upriver boat accessible camping sites. Such formal improvements would likely impact some of the natural areas of the property. However since FWP's goals for the property are to maintain as much of the natural habitats and features as possible while providing the public access to it, FWP will strive to minimize any feasible negative impacts to wildlife and plant communities as well as geologic, cultural, and paleontological features and resources. Specific site development activities (campgrounds, boat launch facility, etc.) will require further environmental assessment as those activities are planned and funded.

The Lincoln property encompasses in excess of 8,800 acres. It is anticipated that fulltime FWP staffing will be required for site management. Only as funding becomes available to accommodate increased public use and maintain improvements can a complete management scenario be put in place. These funding and staffing issues will be discussed internally to discover the best option to meet the management goals of the property.

5.0 NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? No.
If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

Based upon the above assessment, which has identified a very limited number of minor impacts from the proposed action, an EIS is not required and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review.

6.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

6.1 Public Involvement

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *Great Falls Tribune and The Shelby Promoter; and Helena Independent Record*
- One statewide press release;
- Direct mailing to adjacent landowners and interested parties;
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.
- A public meeting to receive comment will be held.

Copies of this EA will be available for public review at FWP Region 4 Headquarters in Great Falls, at the FWP office in Conrad and on the FWP web site.

A public meeting will be scheduled during the public comment period to provide the public a venue to submit comments and have questions answered by FWP staff. This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having few limited physical and human impacts.

6.2 Duration of Comment Period

The public comment period will extend for (21) twenty-one days beginning June 18, 2008. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., July 9, 2008 and can be mailed to the address below:

Lincoln Ranch Acquisition
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4 Headquarters
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Or email comments to: gbertellotti@mt.gov

Offices/Programs contacted or contributing to this document:

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks: Fisheries, Parks and Wildlife Divisions, Lands Bureau,
and the Legal Bureau
Montana Natural Heritage Program
U.S.D.A Natural Resources Conservation Service
Bureau of Land Management

7.0 EA PREPARATION

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**MARIAS RIVER STATE PARK
& WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA**

PROPOSED MANAGEMENT PLAN

July 7, 2008

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**MARIAS RIVER
STATE PARK & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
MANAGEMENT PLAN**

PROPOSED OUTLINE

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PART 1.0 SITE DESIGNATION AND ADMINISTRATION

1.1: Introduction

Marias River State Park and Wildlife Management Area (MRSPWMA) was established IN 2008 as a combination State Park and Wildlife Management Area jointly administered and managed by the Region 4 Wildlife and Parks Divisions.

1.2: Authority

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) undertakes this action by authority of MCA 23-1-102, defining FWP powers and duties regarding the acquisition of lands by fee or donation as state historical sites and recreation areas. The department may cooperate with other federal, state or local agencies to acquire, plan, establish, and maintain parks as authorized by MCA 23-1-107.

FWP is authorized by Section 87-1-209 to acquire lands by purchase, gift, or other agreement, or acquire easements upon lands or waters for certain purposes, including public fishing and outdoor recreation.

The FWP Commission endorsed FWP's proposed "course of action" to pursue acquisition of the property on April 26, 2007.

The Montana Land Board approved FWP acquisition of this property in fee title on {insert date}.

1.3: Management Zones

Marias River State Park and Wildlife Management Area will be divided into two distinct management zones:

- a) **State Park Zone:** This zone will be managed and administered by the Parks Division and will include the following areas:
 - Primary and secondary access roads and parking areas.
 - Visitor contact and information facilities at the primary park portal
 - Vehicle accessible "front-country" campground.
 - The Marias River waterway and land corridor within 100 yards of the riverbank.
 - Designated boat camps on the Marias River corridor.
- b) **Wildlife Management Zone:** This zone will be managed and administered by the FWP Wildlife Division and will include the following areas.:
 - All riparian areas not referenced above, including the valley bottom when greater than 100 yards from the riverbank
 - Coulees and upland areas

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- Wildlife enhancement vegetation plots.

A map will be prepared to visually illustrate and delineate specific locations and acreages of these zones.

PART 2.0 VISION STATEMENT

In the next 10 years, Marias River State Park and Wildlife Management Area will develop into a destination for Montana residents and visitors. The site will provide an equal opportunity for both consumptive and non-consumptive recreationalist to enjoy this public resource. Diverse outdoor recreational opportunities provided at the site include but are not limited to hunting, fishing, river floating, hiking, camping, trail riding, mountain biking, wildlife watching, photography, natural and cultural history discovery and education.

A central component of the site will be the preservation and enhancement of habitat for big game, upland game birds, and waterfowl. Special emphasis will be placed on preserving the relatively undisturbed riparian vegetation along the free flowing Marias River. A balance between visitors needs and healthy resources will be emphasized.

Respect for neighboring landowners, public use, and resource management objectives within the boundaries of the Marias River State Park and WMA will be considered as FWP make decisions regarding activities in the Park and WMA .

Facilities will be developed to enhance the visitor experience, including signs, road improvements, parking areas, comfort stations, camping areas, visitor contact station, trails, and exhibits. These improvements will lead to an increase in visitation to the site. Park management infrastructure will be developed to provide the resources necessary to accomplish park and WMA goals, provide for site stewardship, protect natural and cultural resources, and support a safe, comfortable, and educational visitor experience.

PART 3.0 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS PLAN

The purpose of this plan is to provide general management direction for the State Park/WMA during the initial stages of site management and development. Specific management actions associated with highly sensitive, controversial, or complex issues may warrant the development of issue specific "implementation plans" that would fall under the umbrella of this plan.

The "lifespan" of this plan is expected to last approximately 10 years. As the Park/WMA evolves, an updated plan may be warranted.

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PART 4.0 PUBLIC RESOURCE VALUES

4.1: Fish

The Marias River upstream from Interstate 15 is known to have populations of walleye, burbot, northern pike, rainbow trout and perch. Fishing with rod and reel and setlines is common along this stretch of river.

4.2: Wildlife

Marias River State Park and Wildlife Management Area (MRSPWMA) provides public opportunities for wildlife viewing, hunting and trapping. Mule deer, white-tailed deer, antelope, turkey, sharptailed grouse, pheasant, Hungarian partridge, numerous waterfowl species, bobcat, coyote, beaver, mink, otter and muskrat are all present on the property in harvestable numbers. Non-game birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians are locally abundant, as are raptors and several species of owls. The juxtaposition, number of habitat types and size of this property contributes to the overall quality of the wildlife resource.

4.3: Vegetation

MRSPWMA is mostly native vegetation, with some small tracts of farmland that have been re-seeded to introduced grasses, such as smooth brome and crested wheatgrass.

Upland benches and hills adjacent to the river are made up of combinations of warm and cool season forbs and grasses, for example, western wheatgrass, prairie junegrass, green needlegrass, blue grama, phlox, fringed sagewort and rose.

Sagebrush, chokecherry, snowberry, rose and the above-mentioned grasses are common on terraces and openings adjacent to the river. Some of the open areas in cottonwood and willow bottoms adjacent to the Marias River were plowed up at one time and planted to hay and grain. These areas are now overgrown with smooth brome and noxious weeds.

The riparian zone consists of older cottonwood gallery forest interspersed with assorted willows, chokecherry, buffaloberry and younger cottonwood stands on wet oxbows and exposed sand bars.

A variety of noxious weeds are found along the Marias River and associated coulees, including Russian knapweed, spotted knapweed, leafy spurge, Canada thistle, and musk thistle.

4.4: Heritage Resources

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The Marias River corridor represents an important cultural landscape where indigenous peoples have traveled, camped and subsisted for centuries. In 1806 Meriwether Lewis and four members of the Lewis & Clark Expedition traveled up the Marias River drainage to explore its upper reaches. The only armed conflict with Native Americans occurred about 30 miles upstream on the Two Medicine River, resulting in the death of two Blackfeet men.

The specific type and extent of cultural resources and artifacts are unknown at present, but it's highly likely that the property has a rich assemblage of cultural resources.

4.5: Geological & Paleontological Resources

{To be inserted by Semler}

4.6: Recreation Resources

Marias River State Park and Wildlife Management Area provides outstanding opportunities for a wide range of non-motorized outdoor recreational activities. The backdrop for these activities is a relatively pristine and highly scenic river valley with important natural, cultural resources attributes.

This site provides outstanding opportunities for river floating, camping, angling, hunting, hiking, photography, horseback riding, mountain biking, bird watching, and other outdoor endeavors.

FWP currently does not have any major recreational sites or facilities in the northern tier of Region 4. It is anticipated that this site would provide a coveted recreational destination for residents of the "High Line" communities of North-Central Montana.

4.7: Aesthetic Resources

The site provides a strong sense of place with many aesthetic values important the spiritual and mental health, welfare and morale of Montanans. Specific attributes include but are not limited to the free flowing Marias River, open space, scenic view shed, natural quiet, clean air, and historic landscape.

4.8: Neighboring Properties

Public use, FWP management, and resources found throughout the property will have potential affects to neighboring property owners and the local communities. FWP will work with neighbors and the communities near the property to keep undesirable affect to a minimum and to enhance positive benefits to all. Issues related to weed control, trespass, county tax base, wildlife management, compatible uses, agriculture, recreational users experiences, tourism and economic benefits to the local communities are a partial list of issues to be addressed.

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PART 5.0 NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

5.1: Vegetation Management

Desired Conditions: To utilize livestock grazing, weed control measures and long-term vegetation trend monitoring as tools to promote healthy, viable native plant communities.

Management Strategies:

- a) Develop livestock grazing plan to enhance grassland community vitality
 - rotational rest grazing system
 - season of grazing
 - class of livestock
 - fencing – boundary and interior, electric/barbed wire?
 - vegetation monitoring – utilization, range condition, trend
 - water development/ water lanes
 - grazing lease stipulations
 - assessment of fire danger and develop fire prevention measures
- b) Install boundary fencing for livestock grazing and delineation for recreational users to prevent trespass.
- c) Implement vegetation trend monitoring – grassland and shrub/tree communities
 - photo plots
 - utilization surveys
 - cover plots/transects
- d) Implement treatment of abandoned/reseeded farmland
 - food plots – annual grains
 - legume plantings to attract deer, etc.
 - weed control
 - mowing/grazing/harvesting

5.2: Noxious Weed management

Desired Conditions: To keep introduced noxious weeds controlled to prevent loss of native species and decline in plant community productivity.

Management Strategies:

- a) Coordinate with county weed districts
- b) Formulate long-term weed management plan with monitoring
- c) Implement chemical and biological control measures
- d) Control weeds aggressively

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- e) Work with neighboring land owners on control efforts beyond property boundary to provide area wide weed reduction, control, and reduce spread

5.3: Wildlife Management

Desired Conditions: To maintain healthy wildlife populations for use and enjoyment by the public.

Management Strategies:

- a) Establish trend surveys for big game, furbearers and upland birds
 - aerial trend surveys – big game
 - ground surveys – big game
 - snow track surveys – furbearers
 - lek counts – sharptailed grouse
 - crowing counts – pheasants
 - beaver cache counts
- b) Establish trend surveys for non-game species
 - Implement raptor surveys
 - Implement songbird counts/banding operations
 - Implement bat surveys
- c) Design and implement public access plan
 - mode of travel delineated– walk-in, horseback, vehicular
 - timing of public use – hunting season, winter-spring closures, etc.
 - numbers of people allowed to access at various times and locations
 - educate users to property boundaries and prevent trespass on surrounding private lands
 - monitor and prevent trespass and entry through private property

PART 6.0 HERITAGE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

6.1: Heritage Resource Protection

Desired Conditions: Heritage resources will be protected and interpreted as an integral part of the State Park and WMA landscape.

Management Strategies:

- a) Conduct a compliance level inventory of heritage resources located on the property.
- b) Consult with the State Historic Preservation office for all undertakings with potential to disturb heritage resources.

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- c) Educate the public about the importance of leaving heritage resources undisturbed for future generations.
- d)** Interpret the sites cultural resources through sensitive and appropriate displays, programs, and information.

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PART 7.0 RECREATION MANAGEMENT

7.1: Recreational Opportunities

Desired Condition: Outstanding opportunities will be provided for a diverse range of outdoor recreational opportunities.

Management Strategies:

- a) Appropriate recreational user (consumptive and non-consumptive) will have an equal opportunity to enjoy this public resource.
- b) Public access would be allowed year-round.
- c) Vehicle accessible and backcountry camping opportunities will be provided.
- d) Access to the Marias River waterway will be provided to facilitate river recreation.

7.2: Public Access

Desired Condition: Public access via vehicle, watercraft, horse, and foot will be provided at appropriate and strategic locations.

Management Strategies:

- a) Manage the site for day use only until adequate operations funding and staffing can be secured to ensure site stewardship.
- b) Design and implement public access plan consistent with wildlife management objectives.
- c) Develop a primary entrance with vehicle access near the eastern (downstream) entrance to the site.
- d) Develop a non-motorized watercraft put-in at the Sullivan Bridge area located upstream of the western boundary of the site.
- e) Develop a non-motorized watercraft take-out and put-in near the eastern site entrance and campground area.
- f) Restrict vehicle access to primary and secondary access locations, parking areas, and front country campground.
- g) Prohibit OHV use throughout the site.
- h) Sign and fence property boundary as funds become available

7.3: Public Use Regulations

Desired Condition: Public use regulations will be established, posted, and enforced in a manner that protects public safety and prevents damage or degradation to natural, cultural, or recreational resources.

Management Strategy:

- a) Evaluate existing ARM Rules pertinent to State Parks and Wildlife Management Areas and determine specific authority for public use regulations.
- b) Discharge of firearms and weapons will be restricted to lawful hunting only. Recreational shooting will be prohibited (ARM 12.8.202).

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- c) Pets must be leashed at all times, with the exception of trained dogs used for bird hunting. At all times, dogs must be under the control of their owner (ARM 12.8.203).
- d) Recreational livestock such as pack and saddle animals will be restricted to designated trails and campsites only. Horse riders must accompany horses at all times. Horse grazing will be prohibited. Weed seed-free feed required (ARM 12.8.203).
- e) Motorized vehicles will be restricted to designated road and parking areas. OHV Use will be prohibited (ARM 12.8.204).
- f) Camping will be permitted in designated sites only (ARM 12.8.205).
- g) Campfires will be permitted in designated steel fire grates only (12.8.206).
- h) Gathering or cutting firewood for off-site use will be prohibited (12.8.207).
- i) Removal of natural, geological, historical archeological property will be prohibited except for berries, fallen dead wood, or lawfully taken fish and game (12.8.207).
- j) Commercial use will require a permit in accordance with the Statewide Commercial Use Rules (ARM 12.14.101-170).

7.4: Marketing

Desired Condition: The site will be promoted as a unique public resource and integral part of Montana's State Park and Wildlife Management Area system.

Management Strategies:

- a) Develop a site specific website on the FWP home page.
- b) Develop a site-specific brochure including a map, resource information, recreational opportunities, and regulations.
- c) Work with MDOT to install a "Marias River State Park and Wildlife Management Area" sign on Interstate # 15.
- d) Install appropriate site designation signs at primary access points.

7.5: Camping

Desired Condition: Overnight camping opportunities will be available on a year-round basis in both a front-country and backcountry recreational setting.

Management Strategies:

- a) Develop a vehicle accessible "front country" fee campground near the east (downstream) entrance to the site.
- b) Develop an appropriate number and distribution of designated "backcountry" campsites along the river corridor accessible to river floaters.

7.6: River Recreation

Desired Condition: Outstanding opportunities for floating on the Marias River will be available to the public.

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Management Strategies:

- a) Develop a specific river recreation program implementation plan, including identification of a river recreation carrying capacity and establishment of indicators and standards for high quality social and resource conditions related to river recreation.
- b) Develop a river floating allocation, permit, and fee system.
- c) Promulgate a specific ARM rule that prohibits motorized watercraft on the Marias River from Sullivan Bridge to Interstate 15.
- d) Establish a seasonal river ranger position and river patrol program

7.7: Trails

Desired Condition: Hiking, stock, and mountain bike trails will be developed for public use if suitable locations and trail alignments can be found that do not adversely impact soils, natural features, wildlife, fisheries, and cultural resources.

Management Strategy:

- a) Evaluate potential trail locations, alignments, routes, and destinations.
- b) Design and construct a trail system if appropriate locations can be located.
- c) Develop and implement trail maintenance and signing standards.
- d) Restrict stock use to designated trails or routes.
- e) Limit overnight stock use to designated areas in the front country campground.
- f) Require weed seed free feed for all overnight stock users.

7.8: Sport Hunting

Desired Condition: Outstanding opportunities for sport hunting will be available to the public in accordance with existing hunting districts and regulations.

Management Strategies:

- a) Manage sport hunting in accordance with current hunting districts and regulations.
- b) Implement a hunting access system that allows FWP to monitor hunting activity and establish conditions that allow hunters and non-hunters to safely share recreational resources.
- c) Establish no hunting safety zones around the front country campground and designated boat camps.

7.9: Angling

Desired Condition: Opportunities for angling in the Marias River will be available in accordance with existing creel limits and fishing regulations.

Management Strategies:

- a) Promote appropriate fishing etiquette and catch and release techniques
- b) Develop watercraft and foot portals to facilitate access to fishing waters.

7.10: Education and Interpretation

Desired Condition: Montana State Parks will develop educational and interpretive media and services that tell the story of the area's natural, cultural, and recreational resources.

Management Strategy:

- a) Develop appropriate educational and interpretive themes consistent with park values and resources.
- b) Install a standard State Park informational kiosk at the primary site entrance.
- c) Develop on site park naturalist interpretive hikes and programs.
- d) Provide detailed information regarding the area's natural, cultural, and recreational resources on the FWP home page.

7.11: Commercial Use

Desired Condition: Commercial use will be approved if deemed a necessary and appropriate service for the public enjoyment and use of the site.

Management Strategy:

- a) Develop a commercial use plan with criteria for evaluating commercial use requests.
- b) Permit approved commercial use requests in accordance with the FWP Commercial Use Rule and Commercial Use Fee Rule (ARM 12.14.101-170).

7.12: Public Safety

Desired Condition: Visitors exposure to hazards and safety risks will be minimized through progressive risk management initiatives on the site.

Management Strategy:

- a) Develop an Emergency Operations and Response Plan that promotes a proactive approach to public safety.
- b) Provide an adequate law enforcement patrol and response presence on the site through the use of Game Wardens and Ex-officio Wardens.
- c) Develop appropriate signage, regulatory postings, and educational messages related to public safety.

PART 8.0 ADMINISTRATION, OPERATIONS, & MAINTENANCE

Desired Condition: Funding and staffing will be secured to properly support site administration, operations, maintenance, and stewardship.

Management Strategy:

- a) Develop a strategy to provide an interim site presence capable of providing basic site stewardship while funding and FTE to administer the site is being pursued.
- b) Pursue adequate operations funding and staffing to provide adequate site stewardship, administration, and visitor use management.
- c) Within the first 5 years of operation, securing funding and FTE to support an on site Manager.
- d) Establish the following functional assignments and responsibilities consistent with the FWP Parks and Wildlife Division's joint management of the site:

Parks Division	Wildlife Division	Shared
Visitor Use & Recreation Management	Wildlife Management	Noxious Weed Control
Interpretive Programs & Exhibits	Habitat Restoration and Enhancement	Boundary and Grazing Allotment Fencing
Public Facility Maintenance	Agricultural Plots	Access & Boundary Signing
Emergency Operations & Law Enforcement	Grazing Management	
Public Safety & Risk Management	Hunting Management	

PART 9.0 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Desired Condition: FWP will strive to secure capital funding for public facilities and amenities that enhance the visitor experience.

Management Strategy:

- a) Develop a concept plan for proposed park facilities, including access roads, parking areas, signs, exhibits, comfort stations, vehicle campground, boat camps, trails, river access sites, and primary visitor contact station.
- b) Establish priorities for the phased development of facilities and amenities.
- c) Consult with the State Historical Preservation Office prior to engaging in ground disturbing construction or capital improvement projects
- d) Implement a NEPA compliance process for all major actions including ground disturbing construction or capital improvement projects.